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SUBJECT: Dominica's Opposition Leader Cautiously Optimistic Despite
Flood of Foreign Money Behind Government

DERIVED FROM: DBHardt

Summary

[11](#). (C) Dominica's main opposition United Workers Party (UWP) leader Ron Green was cautiously optimistic in a call on the Charge in Bridgetown December 11, a week ahead of December 18 General Elections. Green lamented the role that outside money was playing in the election, especially by giving the government the ability to fly in Diaspora voters who could turn the tide in a series of tight constituency races that may be decided by ten votes or less. Green underscored that while jobs and corruption were key campaign issues, the UWP message is clearly aimed at PM Skerrit's leadership failures and efforts to enrich himself. Green welcomed the OAS observer mission, but believed it should be deployed earlier in the process and not in the final days of the campaign.

Cash for Christmas ... and a Vote in Return

[12](#). (C) Green told the Charge that cash payments have been given to voters as an inducement to vote for the incumbent Dominica Labor Party (DLP). Green estimated the DLP's campaign budget to be \$9 million USD, about twenty times the resources of the UWP. He alleged that such a massive disparity has allowed the DLP to charter planes, organize elaborate advertising campaigns, and bribe voters. The Diaspora voters are a particular concern, he reiterated, as key districts are being targeted to receive the bulk of those votes. With the Castle Bruce constituency being decided by one vote in 2005, for example, the approximately 800 voters being flown in could alter key district voting tallies.

[13](#). (C) Green repeated a theme heard numerous times about the role of the Freedom Party to act as spoiler. The Freedom Party had allied with DLP in the previous two elections, forming a coalition government in 2000, but it has been frustrated with the current leadership. While it is hesitant to openly partner with UWP for fear of even further marginalizing their status, they are partners behind the scenes. Green maintains that the open breakup of the Freedom-DLP alliance is pulling significant votes away from DLP. While the Freedom Party does not have any seats in parliament, and are predicted to only have a real shot at one district, they make

up a bulk of the undecided voters. Due to the narrow margin in many districts, the Freedom candidate could pull away enough votes to give UWP a plurality and the seat.

OAS Monitoring: More than Just Voting

14. (C) While welcoming the OAS presence, Green expressed concern that the Organization of American States (OAS) observer mission would be too brief to really investigate any possible wrongdoings. Observers, including an embassy poloff, are due to arrive in Dominica on December 16 and observe the election on December 18. With the allegations of vote-buying, restricted media access, and chartered flights, Green hoped that the OAS team would be able to investigate more than just the voting process on election day. The Charge acknowledged these limitations, noting that the process of creating voting lists was also a crucial part of the election. Green hoped to see the day when observers are able to stay in country for 3-4 weeks to address these issues.

UWP Message

15. (C) To move beyond Green's soliloquy against Skerrit, the Charge pressed him to articulate his party's vision for Dominica that he was taking to voters. Green said the UWP's main messages were about jobs and corruption. Regarding the economy, Green stated that Dominicans have a tradition of hard work and just need the right opportunity for jobs. The agriculture and tourism industries in particular have underperformed under the DLP and need to be reformed, he claimed. Green said he would focus on geothermal energy, eco-tourism and private sector growth as the main pillars. Corruption and integrity have traditionally been key election issues, having cost the UWP power in 2000, and the UWP, Green promised, won't stray too far from this script in attacking Skerrit. Green claimed that tax evasion, Skerrit's limited publicly declared assets compared to his actual assets, and the Layou River scandal (septel) as the most salient cases of impropriety that he would seek to exploit in the short campaign.

Comment

16. (C) It is apparent that the UWP believes that Skerrit is vulnerable, and they are focusing their attacks directly on his performance and ethics. Green's lukewarm assessment of the OAS presence is one we hear echoed in most countries by opposition parties, who believe that its limited mandate misses key aspects of electoral corruption and voter registration issues. Despite his misgivings, Green remained upbeat that the opposition would have a good chance of winning, but is concerned that the election could swing on Diaspora voters. End Comment.

17. (C) Ron Green is a competent and seemingly honest politician who was unexpectedly thrust into his role in 2008 with the unexpected resignation and flight of former leader Earl Williams on allegations of having stolen money from a client. For many years, he was a political activist whose NGO's had a strong leftist orientation. While he lacks charisma, he has a strong commitment to improving life in Dominica through providing jobs and reducing the pernicious effects of corruption. Green is likely to continue relations with both China and Venezuela, but has been troubled by the lack of transparency in these bilateral relationships, and shares a healthy skepticism of the motivations of Chavez. Green is occasionally overshadowed by his more celebrated colleague the former PM Edison James who some allege still calls the shots.
HARDT